
Maura Ewing, MA

MITIGATION SPECIALIST

October 21, 2022

Paul Hetznecker, Esq.
1420 Walnut St., Ste. 911
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Re: **2:20-cr-00368-JS-3** *USA v. MATCHETT, ET AL*

SOCIAL HISTORY

Prepared by Maura Ewing
Mitigation Specialist

Dear Mr. Hetznecker,

This social history report of Anthony David Ale Smith was completed at your request. To prepare this report I interviewed Anthony for over four hours, as well as both of his parents, his work supervisor, and six of Anthony's friends from different stages of his life. In addition, I referenced his educational and AmeriCorps service records.

Introduction

A Philadelphia native, Anthony Smith grew from a quiet young boy into a vibrant leader of his community—endearing many people to him along the way. He is a man who lives by his morals and inspires those around him to do the same.

The mitigating factors in this case are overwhelming. Anthony is not threat to the public, rather, he is a treasured asset.

Early Childhood

Anthony Smith was born on October 21, 1991, in Philadelphia. His mother, Tasha Ervin was 22 years old—he was her first child. She and his father, Romeo Smith, were in a committed romantic relationship at the time.

Anthony was born premature, requiring him to stay in the NICU for two weeks before he could come home. But he bounced back and by all accounts was a happy, healthy baby. He hit all his milestones on time and didn't have any lingering health problems.

For the first year of his life, Anthony, his parents, and his older paternal half-sister lived in a West Philadelphia apartment. Tasha quit her job when he was born to be his full time caretaker. But after a year at home with the baby, she was ready to return to the workforce—she worked retail jobs then, as she still does today. When Tasha started working the family moved in with Romeo's parents, who also lived in West Philadelphia, for help with childcare.

Tasha got along well with her in-laws, "They are wonderful people," she said. The Smiths immigrated from Jamaica when they were young and maintained a strong connection with their family who remained on the island, as well as their extended family who like them emigrated to Philadelphia. Anthony recalls a household full of Jamaican family members, some who were just coming through or who stayed for a bit while they got their footing in the city. This household was loving and nurturing.

Like all of Anthony's family members, his grandparents had a very strong work ethic. His grandfather worked at the same South Philadelphia bakery for decades. Romeo recalls Anthony waking up with his grandfather at 3:00 a.m. just to have breakfast with him and see him off to work.

Anthony's parents split up when he was about three, but Tasha continued to live with the Smiths. Anthony still spent time with Romeo, primarily on the weekends.

Tasha and Anthony moved into their own place about a year later, when Tasha was pregnant with her new boyfriend. Soon after, Tasha gave birth to her second child, Ebony. They lived in an apartment in Darby for a few months before moving in with Tasha's close friend, Charmaine Bowie in West Philadelphia. Charmaine had a son who was six or seven years older than Anthony.

The two single mothers shared childcare duties of their two boys: they arranged their work schedules so that one of them would be home when the boys got home from school. Charmaine worked as a nurse's aide, which she still does.

Charmaine remembers Anthony as a respectful, well-behaved child always ready to help his mother—he would go grocery shopping with Tasha for example and put the groceries away. If she were sick, he would want to go to the store to get her what she needed.

Not only did the women never have to punish Anthony (Charmaine's son on the other hand would often land in timeout), but she didn't even need to remind him to do his homework—he would always have it done by dinner. "He had no violence in him," Charmaine said. "He didn't even curse."

Anthony loved to draw. As a child he mostly drew superheroes and robots. Tasha had loved art growing up too—she had wanted to go to art school after high school but couldn't afford it. She encouraged Anthony to continue working at his craft with discipline. He would practice and practice, revise and revise.

Anthony's childhood wasn't all roses though. He suffered from severe asthma from the time he was two or three until high school. "It seemed like we were at the hospital every two weeks," Tasha said. Watching her little boy lay in a hospital bed for days broke her heart.

Anthony remembers spending a Christmas at the hospital.

At first the hospital scared him, but he grew to like it there. Tasha remembers him making the nurses and doctors laugh, they all loved him.

Once released, he would convalesce at home for a few days, with an oxygen tank by his side, before returning to school. Tasha estimates that Anthony missed eight days of school a month due to his illness in elementary school —

he didn't fall behind though because teachers would send packets of work home and he diligently did his work.

When he was eight or nine, he had a particularly bad attack — so bad that the doctors first told Tasha that his lungs likely collapsed. His lungs did not collapse but he did have to stay in the hospital for an entire week until his lungs cleared.

His asthma lessened with age. Today he rarely has an attack, and a standard inhaler is enough to stop it.

Sharon Hill

While living with Charmaine, Tasha steadily saved money for a down payment on a house of her own. In August of 2001, when Anthony was ten years old and his sister Ebony was six, Tasha bought the house where she still lives today in Sharon Hill, a suburb of Philadelphia. She chose this location because she wanted to get her kids out of the city into a safer environment.

The down payment and monthly bills gutted Tasha's savings, so she had no reserves to fully furnish the house. For years, Anthony slept on an air mattress, as did his mom and sister (they shared one). In the living room they had a television, but nothing to sit on.

But Tasha never let on to the kids that she struggled with finances. She made sure that they were always dressed nicely with new clothes and new shoes so that nobody at school would look down on them. With Tasha's positive spirits and focus on what they were fortunate to have, Anthony never felt deprived.

Now that the family lived independently, Tasha lost her built-in childcare (Charmaine). So, when she worked afternoons or nights, the kids fended for themselves. She gave them strict instructions not to play in the street, to lock the door at a certain hour, and to do their homework. And she left them food to heat up for dinner. Though Anthony wasn't even ten years old, he managed to take care of himself and his sister without any problems.

Tasha's very close friend, Will Brown, remembers stopping by at night to check in on the kids. They knew him well, but before letting him in Anthony and Ebony still sought their mother's approval. So, Will would call Tasha to have her call the kids to tell them that it was okay to open the door. Without her word, they would follow the rules to a T. He also remembers that when he did come in to say 'hi,' the two young kids would inevitably have cleaned the kitchen after dinner and finished their homework.

While Anthony does not remember this level of responsibility at such a young age as a burden, it is objectively too much for a young boy to take on. He needed to not only take care of his own needs but also those of his younger sister, with no supervision or help.

Will described Anthony as a shy, kind boy. He took a bit to warm up, but once he did, he was very pleasant to be around. And though he could be quiet, if he had something to say he would speak his mind. And in a group of people that he knew, he could be the life of the party. He made everyone laugh with his jokes.

Anthony primarily resided with his mother during these years, but would spend weekends with his father, Romeo, who still lived in West Philadelphia. Tasha remembered it being hard on Anthony to see other kids do father/son activities like playing ball or going to the movies while his was unavailable. Will would try to fill this gap by brining Anthony along when he went out with his two sons, but it was not the same.

Jr. High and High School

Anthony did well in school, sometimes making the honor roll, and stayed out of trouble. He had many friends but after school he mostly stayed home to read, play video games, and listen to music—he was known for his expansive and eclectic music collection and would often burn CDs for friends and family.

Growing up his parents never talked with him about racial politics, and never told him how to respond if police officers stopped him. So, in a sense he was naïve when several police officers stopped him and two cousins out of the blue to frisk them. Anthony was around 12 years old. The officers didn't find

anything illegal so they went on their way. The encounter scared Anthony but his cousins, who lived in North Philadelphia, were accustomed to this treatment so they weren't phased.

Sadly, like other Black men in this society, Anthony did have negative encounters with police officers when he was young. Once, when he was 12 years old, he and his two cousins were illegally stopped and searched (the officers did not find anything). And again, around that age, an officer threw Anthony to the ground while he fled a fight outside of his school that he had nothing to do with. In this encounter, he dirtied a brand new, white winter coat—a coveted luxury item to him at the time.

Anthony internalized these incidents, now knowing that police officers may see him as a threat regardless of his actions but didn't know how to express what he was feeling. So, he just moved on with his life and did his best to keep his head down.

He couldn't play sports in high school because of his asthma. To fill his time after school, when he was old enough, he started to work. A strong work ethic runs in his blood: both of his parents worked long hours to provide for their families, as did his grandparents. So, at 16 he started working at a women's clothing store on 69th St.—a job his mom helped him land. He continued working there through college. Having an income of his own felt good. He could help around the house and didn't have to depend on his parents for everything.

In the spring of 2010, Anthony graduated from Academy Park High School and set off to a summer program at nearby Arcadia University.

Arcadia University

Anthony is a first-generation college student. Both of his parents were proud, but not surprised that he went on to get a higher degree. His father, Romeo, said they always knew that with Anthony's work ethic and intelligence he would go far in life. Though he imagined that he would be an artist because he is so skilled at drawing and is a deep thinker.

While his family was elated that he enrolled in college, they didn't have experience with the system so could not offer him guidance on things like what to look for in a college, or, most importantly, how to get adequate financial aid.

Arcadia is a private university. Now, Anthony understands it would have been a better choice to go to a public university but at the time wasn't thinking enough about how a private school's tuition would impact on his finances in the long term. Though he got some scholarship money, he had to take out a tremendous amount of student loans to pay for his education. First his mother cosigned, but when her qualified loan amount maxed out, he had to ask his grandparents. Having family member's assets on the line stressed him out. (The loan that his grandparents co-signed was the first that he paid back.) He left college with upwards of \$100,000.00 in debt and an art degree. He is still working hard to save money to pay them all back.

Throughout college he kept his high school job at Easy Pickins, a women's clothing store on 69th St. He also worked at the graphic design lab on campus and for a bit he also worked with a temp agency where he got a job cleaning a factory. He eventually quit that job and started working at Banana Republic near campus.

Some of his peers came from wealthy backgrounds, so they didn't have to work to make money for basic necessities during the school year like him. Anthony didn't feel comfortable discussing his financial situation with any of his friends or classmates.

At school he formed a tightknit group of friends. The friends I spoke to remember Anthony as the glue that kept the group together. He was fun to be around, a caring friend and someone who excelled at navigating group dynamics. If tension grew between any of the friends, he was not shy about addressing it. He was the group mediator.

His friend, Amaar Abdelgader, told me that he immediately appreciated that Anthony, unlike most young men, could articulate his feelings.

"When we were freshmen in college, people were trying to present an image of who they want to be, but Ant was always just who he was. That let him be

emotionally honest, he was connected to how he felt,” Amaar said. “He was able to make his viewpoint well heard.”

His friend Jasmine Peake said that if she ever needed to vent, she would go to Anthony first. She could count on him to break whatever problem was causing her grief down into logical components. She credits him for saving several of her friendships that she was ready to write off following an argument or incident.

Like nearly all Arcadia students, Anthony spent a semester abroad during his third year. He studied in Xian, China, the spring of 2013. Prior to this, he had not traveled much domestically let alone abroad. His semester was eye opening and formative.

Even though he had worked so hard to save money, he went broke mid-semester. One of his classmates lent him some money and he was able to find work tutoring Chinese students in English. He was the only student in his cohort who didn’t have financial support from their families.

He experienced racism in China, but it hit differently than in America. In China, he was an anomaly — people would literally come up with him and ask if they could take a picture with him. People pointed. He hated it, but realized that in a way, the racism there was more innocent than he experienced in America. People weren’t treating him differently because of predetermined beliefs that he was inferior or dangerous which is how he understands American racism.

After about two months he spoke conversational Mandarin. This helped him ward off curious onlookers – he could ward people off by speaking their language.

Despite these negative interactions, Anthony really appreciated his time in China. Learning a new phrase every day, seeing something for the first time, taking the train, walking around by himself in the most foreign place he had ever been — it was all exhilarating.

His semester in China was the first, and only, vacation that Anthony has taken from work since he started working at 16. To this day, the only other time he had off was while he was incarcerated for this case.

The following year, the summer of 2014, Michael Brown was murdered in Ferguson, Missouri, igniting protests against racism and police brutality in cities across the country. Anthony had taken an interest in racial justice prior to this summer, but the groundswell of people who took to the streets demanding equality inspired him. He joined local, nonviolent protests in Philadelphia.

In his early days of attending protests, he found himself drawn to helping the other protesters on the ground more so than he was in having his individual voice heard. At a Philadelphia protest in solidarity with Baltimore after Freddie Grey was killed he witnessed police push children over as well as someone in a wheelchair. He helped as much as he could and admired people who knew how to immediately aid these people. This was the energy that he wanted to be closer with: the solidarity of the people protesting, helping each other while creating community.

After college

After graduating college in December of 2014, Anthony moved back in with his mother in Sharon Hill. While maintaining his job at Banana Republic, he searched for a career path. He freelanced graphic design work but found the low pay and constant self-promotion required exhausting.

During this time, he was also increasingly involved with organizing. He took the lead role organizing various protests. For example, when Darrell Clark announced more money allocated to police, he and others were there to question that decision. He and his peers found ways to have their voices heard peacefully.

He had joined The Philadelphia Coalition for Racial Economic and Legal Justice (REAL), a grassroots action group for racial and economic justice. His fellow member, Rufus Farmer, said that Anthony stood out as a potential leader immediately because he was both wise beyond his years and in-tune with the culture of young black men, he knew how to meet teens and early 20-somethings where they are. He could connect with the youth.

He was a calm presence on the coalition, no matter how tense things got. And he approached the work with compassion.

In December of 2015, a year after he graduated college, Anthony started working for AmeriCorps at West Philly High School. He worked 40 hours a week at the school and kept his job at Banana Republic to make ends meet, all while organizing protests. A typical day for him was waking up at 6am, going to West Philly High School, going straight from there to Center City for a protest or a meeting with Philadelphia REAL Justice, then commuting to Banana Republic in Willow Grove (he worked at the shop near Arcadia, they were unable to transfer him to Center City). He would get home around 1:30 a.m. He would wake up at 6:00 a.m. the next morning to do it all again.

He liked working with the students and teachers at West Philly High School but had some issues with the program. He was theoretically supposed to be helping students prepare their college applications but was surprised to learn that many of the students didn't know the first thing about composing an essay at all — for example, some couldn't tell him what a thesis statement was. Many were far below grade level with writing and reading. While there were some students who were ready and could use his help, he felt like his assignment was misguided. He tried to help students where they were at, whether it was a college essay or just help with homework.

He was able to form close, trusting relationships with students and found satisfaction in informal roles he took on. Students would often find him in his office to say things like, 'I can't do it today, I want to go home,' or they would vent about one problem or another. He listened. Sometimes the solution was as easy as realizing that the student hadn't eaten that day so getting them some food. Sometimes it took a more complex discussion to break down what was really bothering them. Often it turned out to be a situation at home that made them upset. His colleague at the time, Sarah Madha, told me that she didn't know of any other staff member who was so good with difficult students.

Sarah said that beyond schoolwork, Anthony was skilled at talking with young boys in a meaningful way about difficult topics like misogyny and homophobia.

After about a year and a half at West Philadelphia High School, Anthony learned about an opening for an AmeriCorps volunteer at YouthBuild Charter School, a North Philadelphia school that served students from 18 – 21 years old who were finishing their high school diploma. Most came from rough backgrounds; many

were coming straight from jail or homelessness. This demographic interested Anthony, so he applied to transfer.

He remembers his interview at YouthBuild well. The two people who interviewed him completely agreed with his philosophy of education: treat students with respect and meet them where they're at. He could tell that the school was more like a family than an institution. The three of them immediately clicked and they offered Anthony a job as the student life coordinator.

In this role he organized field trips, community service projects, and activities at school. He had a lot of fun with it. He took students hiking in the Wissahickon; he took them to rallies advocating against the demolition of affordable housing; he organized a water balloon fight in the yard; he built a maze with black curtains in the school's community space with them for Halloween and had teachers dress up as monsters. He gave the students a reason to be excited for school.

The population he worked with, young adults giving school a second go, is extremely at-risk of dropping out again—they have no obligation to continue with school, they are there by their own choice—and perhaps turning to street life to make a living. Arguably the most important aspect of working at this school is keeping the students engaged and motivated. This is an area where Anthony excels.

An aspect of the culture at YouthBuild that he particularly loved is the staff's commitment to restorative justice. Restorative justice, an approach to conflict resolution where facilitators organize a meeting between the victim and the offender, often with a mediator. If two students were not getting along, or were feeling bad vibes about one another, staff members would go to great lengths to resolve the conflict before it escalated.

In that role, Anthony won the 2018 Mayor's award for Distinguished National Service.

The school year ended and so did his AmeriCorps program. The position he held needed to be filled by a volunteer so if he stayed on at the school, he would need a new role. Staff were determined to keep him on because students loved him so

much. The social studies teacher role opened up and his now-supervisor Sarah Burgess asked him to apply.

Going from student life coordinator is a very unusual pathway to becoming a teacher at the school Sarah explained—an academic teacher needs qualifications and experience. But she felt confident that Anthony would step up to the opportunity. “We saw his potential as an education how much he cared about young people and how excited they were to be around him.”

She could see how committed he was to “positive youth development,” she said, “he is so community minded and he has a lot of passion for the work and connecting our students to service opportunities.”

In the fall of 2018, YouthBuild hired Anthony to be the new social studies teacher.

Anthony was nervous — he had never taught a class before and felt underqualified. His mentors at the school told him that he did the hard part naturally, keeping students engaged. The rest he could learn.

Indeed, over the past four-plus years he has honed his craft. Sarah said that Anthony is exceptionally good at expanding students’ critical thinking skills. “He encourages debate and dialogue in his classroom, he is committed to the development of young people’s minds.” And, she added, “There is a way he has that people are comfortable in his classroom, they are comfortable being themselves.”

In his class, students choose an issue they care about, they do the research, and they brainstorm solutions or steps that they can take to bring attention to the issue. “As a teacher he has got a real important commitment to helping students think about their world and understand themselves as advocates,” Sarah said. Sarah appreciates his approach because it is grounded in academic skills such as research.

The students love him. In 2021, the students voted him the teacher of the year.

A former student of Anthony’s—or “Mr. Ant” as his students call him—Melanie Osborne told me that his class not only advanced her academic skills, but it also

helped her build confidence. “I struggle with social anxiety, so it has been hard to stand my ground and say what’s on my mind,” she said. “Through Mr. Ant’s class I learned to speak my mind in a way that is non-confrontational.”

He taught her that to get your point across—even if you’re angry—it’s important to speak with logic instead of emotion. She has found that this helps her in her personal life as well as professionally. She and her daughter’s father have a fraught relationship. Now, when she feels a confrontation brewing, she takes a step back and relates her feelings to him in an even-keeled manner, keeping her points logical rather than bursting out at him which would inevitably spark a conflict.

Melanie, 22, dropped out of high school at 16. She grew up in an abusive household — her dad frequently beat her mother, which caused Melanie distress. She struggled with her mental health which manifested by her harming herself. She was in and out of different psychiatric facilities.

At 18, she had her daughter Aurora. At that point she decided she wanted to get her life back on track, for the sake of her daughter. So, in the fall of 2020 she started school at YouthBuild. With the help of teachers like Anthony, she excelled.

Melanie graduated at the top of her class. She is now working towards an associate degree in psychology from the Community College of Philadelphia. She aspires to be a youth counselor to help kids who are like she was as a teenager.

“Mr. Ant is a role model. For him to hear my opinions and take them seriously about ways to change issues going on in the world, it gave me confidence,” she said. “And it gave me hope to maybe one day see change in our city because of people like Mr. Ant.”

Anthony inspired her to be a more engaged community member. He serves food to unhoused people every week through Food Not Bombs and encouraged students to find a way to give back to their community. Because of his encouragement Melanie got involved with a neighborhood nonprofit

organization, Block Gives. With them, every weekend, she cleans around the neighborhood and feeds her underprivileged neighbors.

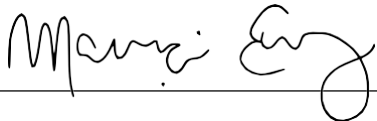
“I feel like community service has such a negative stigma, like you only do it when you get in trouble. But it’s actually really amazing,” she said. “He showed me how important it is. With so many extreme problems going on in the world it’s easy to feel like as one person you can’t really make a change. He taught that with little steps you *can* make a change.”

If Anthony were not able to continue teaching due to legal issues, the YouthBuild community would be devastated Sarah, his supervisor, said. “In some ways Ant really carries the spirit of YouthBuild at our best— what we want to be,” she said. “Losing him would not just be the loss of a teacher, but the loss of a really vibrant heartbeat of our community”

Conclusion

Anthony is a pillar of the community; a role model to struggling youth. He is a caring son, brother, teacher, and friend. Apart from the action in question, Anthony has been an exemplar Philadelphian.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Maura Ewing", written over a horizontal line.

October 21, 2022

Maura Ewing